

Ohmann-Dumesnil (A. H.)

A case of Intermittent
pruritus.



A CASE OF INTERMITTENT PRURITUS.* By A. H. OHMANN-DUMESNIL, St. Louis.

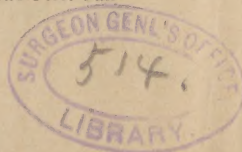
Pruritis is one of the neurotic disturbances of the skin which has never lost interest for the student of cutaneous disorders. As it is embraced in the great class of diseases whose symptoms are entirely symptomatic and whose etiological factors have a greater or less obscurity clouding them, we are more or less attracted in their further study; and this is one of the chief reasons why I desire to place upon record a case which is unique in my experience and of which I have not seen a similar record in my reading. To begin with, I will first detail the case, reserving my observations for further discussion to a later time. I desire to premise that the patient is still a resident in my city and is occasionally seen, and that, at latest accounts, the conditions which I am about to describe remain unaltered, although it is but just to remark that no treatment whatever has been attempted up to the present.

CASE.—Mrs. W. is a woman of medium height who is well-nourished. She has a good suite of brown hair; that on the pubes and in the axillæ being also of good growth. She is 29 years of age. Her menstruation was always normal and regular previous to her marriage, which took place when she was 16 years old. When 17 years of age she bore a child, which is now 12 years of age. At this time (that of delivery) she experienced quite an extensive laceration of the cervix uteri. A series of domestic troubles culminated in her taking four ounces of tincture of opium on March 6, 1889. Through the strenuous efforts of the physicians called in to treat her she was saved, and her next menstrual period occurred on April 16 of the same year.

It is from this time that her present trouble dates. She has been observed in her attacks, and they all resemble each other. Before, during, or immediately after menstruation she is the subject of an intense pruritus which attacks the entire integumentary surface. The itching is equally severe everywhere and no amount of scratching will relieve it. An attack will continue for 24 to 36 hours, although at first the duration was three days. Among the peculiarities observed during an attack is that the face assumes an intense red color, and in addition to this the

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pupils contract to one-third the normal size. Another peculiarity is that the most violent scratching produces no lesions whatever.

It sometimes happens that an attack of the trouble is missed, yet the patient will continue to menstruate normally at regular periods. Not long since (July, 1893) she was successfully operated upon for her laceration, but the attacks of pruritus have recurred since.

This patient has never taken opium nor any narcotic since the poisonous dose referred to above, and she was not addicted to their use prior to that event. In fact, she has never taken medicine of any kind at any time, unless it be a little extract of peppermint or a mild saline cathartic.

A fact which has been observed is that the attacks grow milder every year, despite the circumstance that she has never been treated for the trouble.

This woman is extremely nervous in disposition. She is restless, and when awake has a habit of tearing paper into bits, and has in general destructive impulses of a mild character. She is of a passionate disposition, and the sexual orgasm is of an intense character in her case. She is also inclined, in a great degree, to erotomania, being upon the very verge of being an erotomaniac, although not suffering from nymphomania.

This case offers some peculiarities which, to my mind, are not easy of solution. The etiological factors are far from being clearly defined. The pruritus cannot be said to depend upon any uterine disorder, for it did not occur anterior to the date of the opium poisoning. On the other hand, the ingestion of the narcotic cannot be directly called upon as a factor in the production of the itching. Whilst we know that opium and some of its alkaloids produce pruritus, this subjective trouble disappears upon the cessation of the action of the medicament. Of course, it may be said that the ingestion of such a large quantity of opium produced a certain effect upon the nerve centres and that this was perpetuated, but it is merely re-stating facts as they exist. The regularity of the appearance of the attacks, with a possible few exceptions, is analogous to some other conditions which have been observed in connection with certain cutaneous affections, notably recurrent exfoliative erythema. Or, closely resembling the recurrent attacks, at regular intervals, which are observed in certain diseases which are supposed to be of nervous origin, such as hay fever, epilepsy, etc. The fundamental cause of this periodical recurrence has never been definitely ascertained, and I must perforce be satisfied in simply recording an interesting condition and confess my inability to account for it in any manner which would prove either adequate or satisfactory.

